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SUBJECT: MUASHER ON PRODUCTIVE KUWAIT MEETING, PERSISTENT PROBLEMS WITH SYRIA

REF: KUWAIT 539

Classified By: Amb. Edward W. Gnehm for reasons 1.5 (b) (d)

SUMMARY

1. (S) FonMin Muasher told the Ambassador February 18 that the Iraq neighbors Foreign Ministers meeting in Kuwait had been frank and productive, with the neighbors arguing strongly for guarantees of Iraqi unity and the rights of Iraqi minorities. Iraqi FonMin Zebari responded that Kurds do not want a separate state, but will seek to preserve some of the independence they have enjoyed for twelve years. Muasher complained to Zebari that IGC member Ahmed Chalabi had spoiled two Jordanian bank deals in Iraq. According to Muasher, Syrian FonMin Sharaa was the only negative voice at the Kuwait meeting, and is increasingly an irritant in inter-Arab relations. END SUMMARY

PRODUCTIVE FONMIN MEETING IN KUWAIT

2. (S) Foreign Minister Marwan Muasher described the Iraq neighboring states Foreign Ministers meeting to the Ambassador and PolCouns February 18 as "a good honest discussion." He said that for the first time, Iraqi FonMin Zebari had fully participated in the discussions. For their part, the neighboring states had told Zebari that, without a strong Iraqi commitment to unity, Iraqi federalism is a regional -- not only internal -- issue that affects the interests of neighboring states. Similarly, the lack of protection of minority rights in Iraq could cause instability and become a regional issue as well.

3. (S) Zebari responded by saying that -- speaking as a Kurd -- there is no possibility of the creation of a separate Kurdistan, and that Kurds understand there is no support for the idea in the region. However, Kurds have been living a semi-independent existence for twelve years, and will not be willing to give up that status completely. Accordingly, Zebari reportedly argued, Kurds "need to be recognized as a special case." Zebari told the group that Iraqi Shia want not only to rule Shia areas of Iraq, but all of Iraq.

4. (S) Muasher said that Zebari had underscored the desire of the Iraqi government to cooperate closely and cement good relations with Jordan, "regardless of the opposition of Ahmed Chalabi." Muasher said he told Zebari that Jordan, too, wanted close cooperation with Iraq, but blamed Chalabi for spoiling deals negotiated by Jordan's Arab Bank and Export and Finance Bank with Iraq banks. Muasher said he would be raising this issue with senior USG officials on his upcoming trip to Washington.

SYRIA THE ODD MAN OUT

5. (S) In this frank and productive discussion, Muasher commented, "the Syrians stood out like a sore thumb. Even the Iranians were positive." For example, Muasher said, Syrian FonMin Farouq Sharaa insisted that Syria would not agree to any document that referred to the November 15 agreement between the CPA and IGC, "since it was not approved by all members of the Governing Council." (Muasher said that Zebari shot back that he doubted that all policies of the Syrian government were approved by all segments of Syrian society.) During the meeting, Muasher said that Zebari had asserted -- without specifics -- that terrorist leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi is "moving freely back and forth between Iraq and Syria," as are other al-Qaeda operatives. Muasher had the impression that Zebari might have been exaggerating a bit.

SYRIAN "STARK IGNORANCE"

6. (S) Sharaa's behavior in Kuwait, Muasher said, simply underscores Syria's "stark ignorance" of the U.S. and the rest of the outside world. Bashar al-Asad had told King Abdullah on his recent visit to Damascus that he was not worried about who would win the U.S. presidential elections, since even a Democrat could choose to keep on the senior civilian officials

in the current administration. Similarly, Sharaa had told the Jordanians accompanying the King a tabloid-like story that showed how out of touch with reality he is: Sharaa told the group that British Prince Charles would soon be implicated in a Scottish judicial investigation into Princess Diana's death, and was consequently planning a trip to Iraq and Iran "to seek the support of the Muslim world." "They just don't get it," Muasher lamented.

COMMENT

17. (S) Muasher was enthusiastic about the frank and positive tone of the Kuwait neighboring states meeting. However, he is focusing more and more on Syria -- and Farouq Sharaa in particular -- as the cause of friction in inter-Arab relations and an impediment to progress.

18. (U) CPA Baghdad minimize considered.

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